

the Division Marines located at Camp Commando, as it impacted just outside the camp, less than a kilometer from the Division Administration Center (DAC). (This was the first of only a very few missiles that got through the shield of the Patriot system in that area. Later, others were to strike civilian targets in Kuwait City, including a pier and a shopping mall.) The Scud Alarm sounded 38 times at Commando Camp, but the Patriots successfully destroyed all other missiles. The Marines at Camp Commando were made well aware that the defensive systems were not infallible, and that they too were very much a part of this war. Fortunately, none of these missiles were armed with chemical warheads.

20 March

Clearing the Obstacles and Passage Of Lines with the Kuwaitis

The last minute Kuwaiti obstacle reduction continued. The Kuwaiti contractors hired for the job were skilled and efficient, but the Iraqis had chosen to make the task more difficult by the occasional mortar attack. Some of these mortar fires were quite well aimed and caused the Kuwaiti contractors a bit of concern. Alpha Company, 1st Tank Battalion, and Alpha Company, 3^d LAR Battalion reassured the contractors by their presence, and the engineers continued to push to get all the breaching work accomplished in time. Marines rode 'shotgun' on the contractor's equipment, using their Night Vision Goggles (NVGs) to help guide the efforts. The berm reduction crew even took two enemy prisoners prior to the commencement of ground operations (G-day). Two Iraqi border guards had made their way across the border, and told a tale of beatings and executions by the Regime. The legal status of these defectors was questionable, as they had come into Kuwait prior to the commencement of ground operations, and they were turned over to the Kuwaitis. The last of the breach lanes were cleared just in time to support the Division's attack.

The Kuwaiti 26th Brigade in the east and the 35th Brigade in the west manned their positions along the border to detect and interdict any Iraqi infiltration. These units each had Reconnaissance and antitank missile elements operating well forward in the border obstacle area. In the tense pre-combat environment, conducting a smooth Passage of Lines (POL) that avoided fratricide was critical. An accident at this point could derail the early momentum of the attack, even before the Division crossed the LD. Over a two-day period, the Marines would conduct a smooth RIP with the Kuwaitis on the border. On 19 March, RCT-7 passed forward of the 61st Tank Battalion of the Kuwaiti 26th Brigade, and on the following day RCT-5 conducted a passage of the 7th Battalion of the Kuwaiti 35th Brigade. Because of the careful pre-coordination efforts of Major Clark Watson, the Division LNO to the Kuwaiti Land Forces, the POL at the border was accomplished without incident. A few days later, after the Division had passed through, the Kuwaitis occupied forward positions on the border and resumed their vigilance against Iraqi threats to the Coalition's rear areas.

Tensions along the border area remained high, especially for 11th Marines and the counterbattery fight. With the counterbattery radars in position, the 'Cannon Cockers' provided responsive fires within minutes. This aggressive, responsive counterfire was to be demonstrated repeatedly during the ensuing weeks. In one instance, 3^d LAR Battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Stacy Clardy had pushed Alpha Company up to the berm to screen forward of the Division's Attack Positions and the firing PAs of 11th Marines. Captain John Custis' Alpha

Company began to receive incoming mortar fire from an Iraqi border guard post across the border, and called it in. Before Alpha Company could even get the 'snowstorm' (incoming artillery) report out over the radio, 11th Marines had detected the enemy mortar fire and had engaged with counter battery artillery. Alpha Company also returned fire, in the Division's first direct firefight cross the international border. Unwisely, the Iraqis initiated the action, and were met with a deadly response by the Marines. A combination of indirect fire, 25mm Bushmaster cannon, and a single TOW missile destroyed the border guard post, eliminating the threat.

Moving into the Attack

On 20 March, I MEF officially took control of the battlespace, and 3^d MAW began vigorous preparatory fires on the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division. The Division still anticipated a two-day separation between A-day and G-day, and waited, poised to go at anytime. The Division would get its battlespace at 1500Z on 20 March, and H-hour was set for 0300Z on 21 March. ('Zulu' time is referenced to Greenwich Mean Time. It provides a common time reference for forces operating across time zones, and is important to avoid confusion between forces that may be operating thousands of miles apart. The local time in Iraq was typically three hours ahead of 'Zulu', so 0300Z corresponded to six o'clock in the morning in most of Iraq.) Fire Support Coordination Line (FSCL) One would also be established at 1500Z, followed by FSCL Two at 1530Z. The Division CG was in constant motion as he worked with higher headquarters to



Marines in the Division Main CP monitor the progress of the shaping efforts. Marines worked in close concert to collect and process battlefield information in order to direct fire assets and maneuver units.

adjust the timing of the opening fight to match the circumstances on the ground. Throughout the day, he was to stay in close contact with Lieutenant General Conway, Major General Brimms from the 1st UK Division, and Major General Amos from 3^d MAW. The Blue Diamond team was in its 'fighting stance', and stood balanced and ready to attack.

As the shaping fires began to execute, and the Division prepared to attack the following day, a strange incident took place. The G-2 had confirmed the movement of additional infantry elements to the border area with the departure of the UN Observers. With the P-3 aircraft and Pioneer UAV, the

battlespace just across the LD had been observed repeatedly (to the limits of these platforms) and there was no other significant activity noted. The Division was prepared to execute the attack against the base enemy laydown that had been briefed. As always, there had been a number of conflicting intelligence reports received, some indicating greater reinforcement by the Iraqis in the south. One of the challenges for the Division had been to sift through the competing and

often contradictory intelligence indicators received from external sources, and patch together its own assessment of the enemy's laydown to the front. The G-2 had not been able to verify any of the more 'spectacular' claims of massive reinforcements in the south. In fact, on 20 March, NIMA had produced a comprehensive laydown of the 51st Mechanized Infantry Division, identifying the locations of most of their equipment, and not detecting any major reinforcement. On this day, however, RCT-7 received a strange visitor who was to influence the execution of the Opening Gambit.

An Iraqi informant was brought to the RCT-7 CP by a clandestine American unit. When questioned by a skeptical RCT-7 command team, this informant was presented as a credible source that had never been wrong in the past. Now he gave RCT-7 a new report that the Iraqis had stealthily positioned an entire Republican Guard Armor Brigade to the terrain just north of Safwan. To further corroborate his story, the informant made a phone call to a contact north of the border, who reported that he could see the enemy tanks being hit by air as they spoke, and the tank crewmen running for cover. This brigade had allegedly moved into their positions over the last several nights by a combination of road and rail, and had infiltrated into well-camouflaged positions under cover of darkness and bad weather. The reported presence of this brigade ran counter to the intelligence reporting from higher, and, if true, significantly altered the enemy picture to the front of RCT-7. The 'ghost brigade', if truly there, was right where one would expect it to be in order to counter the Division's attack. Complete fidelity of the Iraqi order of battle had been constrained by the lack of comprehensive imagery coverage for the last couple of days. The report seemed highly unlikely, but it was possible. There had been various reports of T-72s throughout the month of March, but none had been confirmed. The Division Commander flew out for a face-to-face meeting with the informant. An entire brigade of T-72 tanks was a justifiable concern on the part of Colonel Hummer, and the concern was voiced to the Division. The G-2 scrambled to confirm or deny this reporting, but could find nothing that would indicate it was true. As is often the case with HUMINT of this nature, however, it was not possible to prove the negative (i.e. the G-2 could not 'prove' the tanks were not present.) The tanks could not be detected by any of the assets looking at that area, but did that mean they were not there, or was this a tribute to their excellent camouflage techniques? Did the enemy tanks, as reported, have thermal covers that hid their heat signatures from infrared detection? The Division CG received all this information and contemplated his options.

The Division's reaction to this crisis was a perfect example of the aggressive and proactive spirit the CG had built into the Division. There was no way that the fog of war surrounding this incident would be lifted before the Division planned to launch its attack, and many might have recoiled from that uncertainty. Recognizing the criticality of every moment for the preservation of the strategic oil infrastructure, however, the Division was to take a different course. The CG was adamant about the Division's responsibility to facilitate the success of the RCT commanders, and this would not be an exception. Now the CG was going to simultaneously address the RCT-7 commander's concerns and accomplish the Division's operational missions by aggressive action. Far from being deterred by this information, the Division viewed it as an opportunity. Not only would the Division crush the 51st Mechanized Division, but they would also bottle up and destroy whatever elements of the Republican Guard the Regime had foolishly thrown into the path of the Marines. "If those bastards are down there, we were going to bottle them up and kill them all," was the CG's expression of a new plan that would send a shock wave through the

enemy ranks. Within hours, the Division made the necessary changes to the base plan. In a tribute to the flexibility of the Marines, a plan that had been carefully worked for months was quickly adjusted to meet the realities on the battlefield within hours. No small part of the new plan was the participation of the ever-ready 1st UK forces on the eastern flank. With a quick call, the 1st Marine Division CG and the Commander of the 1st UK Division were able to coordinate the attack of 1st UK forces into a portion of the zone that would now be unused by the Marines. Without hesitation, the Brits agreed to support the revised plan, sealing the enemy's fate.



The CG and ADC discuss intelligence concerning the 'Ghost Brigade' reported north of Safwan. " If they are really down there, we are going to bottle them up and kill them all."

Under the revised plan, the Division would first launch RCT-5 to block Highways 8 and 1 north of the Rumaylah oilfields to ensure nothing escaped west once the ground fight began. RCT-5 would also take the early opportunity to seize the western elements of the critical oilfield infrastructure, preventing their destruction. RCT-7 modified its scheme of maneuver to send 1st Tank Battalion and 3^d Battalion, 4th Marines (3/4) to the west of *Jabal Sanam*. This task-organized force would emerge from the north side of the rugged *Jabal Sanam* terrain into the flank of the alleged T-72 force. The other elements of RCT-7 would then attack through the smoking ruins of the alleged Republican Guard unit, and seize their original objectives. Major Ron Spears, the RCT-7 S-2, worked with the G-2 to find a new attack route for the Tank task force and continued to look for T-72s. Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vuckovich, the RCT-7 S-3, developed the new orders for the conduct of the attack. The RCT-7 staff emerged with a plan that they later assessed was even better than their original base plan at achieving the RCT objectives. The Division CG consulted with the I MEF CG and 3^d MAW pushed fixed and rotary wing aircraft north of the border to locate and destroy this alleged new tank threat.

As fate would have it, one of the Division's M1A1 tank platoons from 1st Tank Battalion was in a forward position at this moment as part of the security force for the border obstacle breaching. As a condition for continuing breaching operations, the Kuwaiti contractors working on the berm had adamantly insisted upon tanks in an overwatch position. Alpha Company, 1st Tank Battalion, sent one tank platoon forward. It grew dark but the berm reduction continued, as did the enemy mortar fire. Rumors about enemy reinforcements near the border were also heard, contributing to the fog of war experienced in the tense border area. Captain Banning, the Company commander was with the forward platoon. While forward positioned, his tank traversed the turret to the rear for the gunner to pass the thermal imager to the driver. The tankers heard AH-1W Cobras overhead, and were motivated by the air support being provided on the far side of the border. Realizing that the Cobras operating in their airspace were not under



This M1A1 took a direct hit by a Hellfire missile when it was mistaken for an Iraqi tank by supporting aircraft.

their control, however, the Air Officer scrambled to find out just who was controlling them. Just then, one of the Cobras fired a Hellfire missile toward one of the friendly M1A1s on the border. The missile impacted the tank, generating a large explosion and a ball of flame. Fortunately, this was a new type of Hellfire called an AGM-114M. It was an Annular Blast Fragmentation (ABF) munition designed to produce a multi-directional blast designed to destroy targets via fragmentation. Because of the type of missile used, it did not penetrate the tank's armor and only Captain Banning was injured. He refused evacuation, as it was "too early to leave the fight." Alpha Company

was later chopped to RCT-1, and the Marines would be very happy to have Captain Banning and his company later in the attack to Al Kut. The aircraft that fired the missile had come from HMLA-269, flying off one of the ships of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) offshore. Subsequent investigation revealed that the aircrew had misidentified the tank and its position



Iraqis began to ignite their own oil wells as part of a 'scorched earth' campaign. Because of the rapidity of the attack, the Division was able to secure most of them intact.

relative to the border due to the poor visibility, and a heightened awareness of a potential Iraqi armor presence near the border. This incident served as a significant reminder to the members of the Division and 3^d MAW. No one needed to be told twice to display their air panels, and aircrews across the Coalition were reminded of their positive identification responsibilities. This incident was one of a very few friendly air fire incidents that were to happen throughout the war.

Now, another threat loomed. The Iraqis were reportedly beginning to destroy oil wells near the southernmost GOSP, only three kilometers north of the Kuwaiti border. The Division's attack was still planned for the following morning, but concerns began to build as the risks to the oilfields became more acute. The Pioneer detected and intelligence reports confirmed the burning oil wells. Later in the morning, VMU reported that another wellhead in the vicinity of the GOSPs was on fire. This was an indication that the much-anticipated destruction of the oil infrastructure was beginning. Iraqi missile attacks continued, and the alert code, "Lightning, Lightning, Lightning," was

repeatedly sounded. There were reports of missile strikes landing near Camp Commando, and the boom of distant explosions in the Iraqi oilfield areas could be heard (whether from American bombs or Iraqi sabotage was not known.) The risk of destruction of the oil infrastructure was becoming unacceptably high.

On the Division's eastern flank, 3 Commando of the 1st UK Division, including the attached 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (whose ground combat element was 1st Marine Division's own 2^d Battalion, 1st Marines) successfully seized the Mina-al Bakr offshore oil terminal in the Arabian Gulf, and the pipeline manifolds on the Al Faw peninsula; critical elements to restoring the oil infrastructure required to rebuild Iraq. The Division cheered the success of their comrades, and looked across to the South Rumaylah infrastructure with anticipation. It was imperative that the MEF unleash the Division soon before Iraqi sabotage made it too late to get the rest of the infrastructure intact.



The CG and MEF Commander review options for launching the attack to secure the oil infrastructure.



Marines pass the final Kuwaiti border checkpoint before entering Iraq near the South Rumaylah oilfields.

The CG was in constant communication with the MEF Commander, and together they reviewed the strategic options. Presented with the opportunity to secure the infrastructure intact and possibly destroy an RG brigade in the process, both men were eager to strike. Lieutenant General Conway communicated this to the CFLCC Commander. As the senior commanders weighed this situation, the Division CG called Colonel Dunford at RCT-5 and told him to be prepared to go earlier than the scheduled crossing of the Line of Departure (LD). "No problem," was the reply. The CG called back again and told Colonel Dunford to be ready to go the evening of 20 March. Again, "No Problem." The CG called once more to say it did not look like the Division would attack until dawn the next day. After receiving another call from the MEF Commander, however, the CG called Colonel Dunford a final time. "Grizzly 6 (Colonel Dunford) this is Chaos, how fast can you be ready to go?" "General, we can go now," came the reply. The new LD time for RCT-5 was set for 1730Z on 20 March.

Crossing the Line of Departure

In the latest of a flurry of FRAGOs, the Division issued the order for RCT-5 to initiate the attack. The main effort shifted from RCT-7 to RCT-5 to support the change. RCT-5 would attack in zone to defeat enemy forces and secure the critical oil infrastructure. This would prevent further destruction of South Rumaylah oilfields, would block the westward retreat of the alleged RG brigade, and would isolate the 51st Mechanized Division.



Artillery-delivered shaping fires on their way to silence artillery supporting the 51st Mechanized Division in the South Rumaylah oil fields.

With the accelerated timetable, the shaping fight took on new urgency. Third MAW and 11th Marines turned to the fight with a vengeance. With only a few hours before the scheduled Division LD, Aerial Interdiction strikes were focused on the pre-attack targets identified by the Division and previously cleared from the Restricted Target List. The previously scheduled preparatory fires syllabus was adjusted to the new timings, and these fires began. *Jabal Sanam* was struck repeatedly in the afternoon and into the evening by fixed wing strikes. At 0220Z, a section of Harrier jets dropped five Mk-83 one thousand pound bombs on *Jabal Sanam*. Rotary wing strikes followed closely on their heels, and the Cobras closed in to kill anyone remaining alive on the mountaintop observation post. The rotary wing assets also flew against identified fixed border guard posts, and gave them similar treatment. Elements of RCT-7, deployed in the Division's security zone, enjoyed a front row seat to this awesome demonstration of firepower,

and their confidence for the coming battle continued to grow. Now it was the Cannon Cockers turn. 11th Marine Regiment preceded RCT-5's attack with a 30-minute preparation fire on the enemy's artillery positions. As the Marines of RCT-5 later passed through the devastated Iraqi positions in the South Rumaylah, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Toal expressed appreciation for their artillery brethren, "Artillery did a hell of a job on the Iraqis!"

On 20 March, RCT-5, led by Colonel Joe Dunford, became the first major ground combat force committed to the removal of the Saddam Hussein Regime. The major elements of RCT-5 included 2^d Tank Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mike Oehl; 1st LAR Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Duffy White; 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Fred Padilla; 2^d Battalion, 5th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dan O'Donohue; and 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Sam Mundy. The RCT was supported by 2^d Battalion, 11th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Paul O'Leary, Bravo Company, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, commanded by Captain Brad Aiello, and CSSC-115, commanded by Captain Suzan Thompson. Elements of 1st Radio Battalion, 1st Intelligence

Captain R. Michael Ackerson describes the roll into combat with Ironhorse:

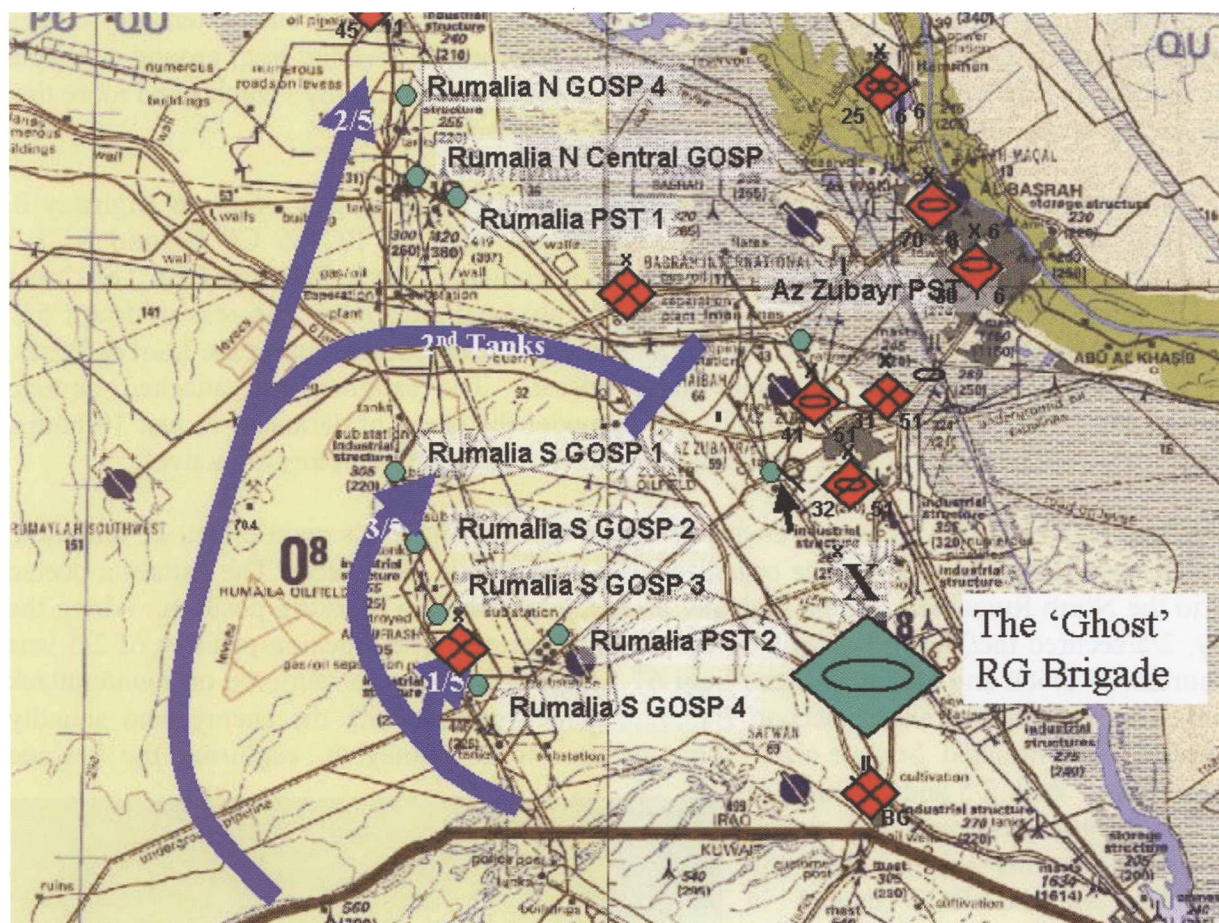
Awakening at 0100 on 20 Mar 2003 to don MOPP suits, comfort became the first, if unofficial, casualty of this newborn war. Over the course of the next 12 hours, the brevity code "Lightning, lightning, lightning" would ring out at least 3 or 4 times. Scrambling into MOPP-4 became altogether too familiar. Every Marine is well versed in "sucking it up", enduring conditions that would floor the average civilian. Day one of the war was serving up an appropriate warm-up – some time to mentally dig in for the upcoming suffer-fest. Ironically, MOPP-4 does confer one advantage: At that point, the discomfort meter is already pegged. Simmering inside my NBC mask and protective gloves, I knew I was at the maximum; "All-clear" would bring the luxurious pleasure of wearing only the MOPP suit, flak, and associated combat gear. That is, of course, until we were being shot at...

At 1530 (on 20 Mar 2003), amid the bustle of last-minute preparations and adjustments, the words abruptly cut off a thousand preoccupied thoughts: "We're going in two hours." So much for 12 hours of notice. A hundred faces, an equal number of expressions. Excitement, fear, concern, relief that the waiting was (finally) almost over. Game day had arrived. Moving along the tanks of Delta Company, I exchanged hasty words with many of the Marines, particularly those of White (2d) Platoon. Some of this group included Major Cox, Captain Lindgren, Master Sergeant Eisel, Sergeants Hughes and McDonald, Corporals White, Dolce, and Johnson, and Lance Corporals Juliana and Bowers. Major Payne jogged in, announcing our departure in 30 minutes. I gave a thumbs-up, saying "Good luck, boys, kick ass" and broke into a trot towards the COC.

A voice in the track shouted an expletive, announcing that he had just seen an incoming Scud Missile shot out of the sky. All eyes turned skyward, remaining there to watch the light show provided by outbound ATACMS and RAP rounds. Not long after that, "Lightning, lightning, lightning" was heard. Sweet. Masked up, we settled in for the inevitable – a long night in MOPP-4. We were amazed – but not complaining – when we received the order to unmask. Back in monitor-mode, the Bravo Command rumbled through the breach. Each Marine was absorbed in his own thoughts, isolated from one another by 80 decibels of mechanized racket.

Battalion, and other supporting elements were included. The RCT's assault elements successfully crossed the LD at 1730Z, after smoothly adjusting to a timing that was nine and a half hours earlier than the originally scheduled H-Hour.

20-21 March Grizzly in the Attack



RCT-5's plan to cross into Iraq, block the alleged Republican Guard Brigade, and secure the North and South Rumaylah oil infrastructure.

RCT-5's mission was to seize the four strategically significant GOSPs of the South Rumaylah Oilfields, block the 6th Armor Division at the North Rumaylah Bridge, and block the 51st Iraqi Mechanized Infantry Division along Highway 8. RCT-7 would attack to their east at the original H-hour, less than 10 hours later. RCT-5 attacked through two breach sites, each consisting of three lanes. Just prior to the attack, the Iraqis emplaced a minefield in the middle lane of the western breach site. The lane remained fouled during the attack despite the efforts of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, and a sniper who shot several of the mines causing them to explode. This obstacle had no significant effect on the attack. 1st LAR Battalion, supported by 7th Royal Horse Artillery's light gun batteries, established the RCT security zone

inside Iraq, and provided overwatch across the RCT-5 zone of action as the RCT prepared to attack.

Second Tank Battalion ('Ironhorse') led RCT-5's main attack through the western breach site, moving through breach lanes 'Red 1' and 'Red 3'. Ironhorse attacked quickly through the relatively open desert on the western flank, in order to establish a blocking position that would trap the enemy in the Az Zubayr area. Over the next 10 hours, Ironhorse would push beyond the initial over-watch set by 1st LAR Battalion and advance into uncovered enemy territory. They attacked along an axis to the west of the oilfield infrastructure, uncovering Iraqi ground at a rapid rate and destroying everything hostile in their path. Twenty-seven enemy vehicles and more than 100 enemy ground forces were destroyed in their initial attack.

As dawn broke on 21 March, 2^d Tanks established their blocking position on Highway 8. This was accomplished with minimal communications with the RCT-5 CP beyond RCT-5 reporting successive waypoints and significant enemy contacts. Battle Position (BP) 'Tank' was 25 km west of Iraq's second largest city, (Al Basrah), and situated in the rear of Iraq's 51st Mechanized Brigade. From this position, Ironhorse was capable of disrupting the Iraqi defenses, and provided a catalyst for the Iraqi's hasty retreat. The battalion had attacked through approximately 70 km of enemy territory, entirely under the cover of darkness, in just 10 hours. Conditions were now set for adjacent elements of RCT-5 to secure their key objectives.

While Ironhorse moved to trap enemy forces to the east, RCT-5's main effort, 2^d Battalion, 5th Marines (2/5), followed in trace organized as a mechanized task force. The battalion peeled off to the North Rumaylah oilfield highway bridge, establishing a blocking position. Along the way, 2/5 secured the North Rumaylah oilfield infrastructure. The blocking position of 2/5 was important to block any attempts of the Iraqi 6th Armored Division to reinforce or counterattack south of the Saddam Canal. Second Battalion gained contact with the enemy, and soundly defeated the estimated brigade-sized force in the North Rumaylah, capturing the brigade commander. With 2/5 and 2^d Tanks in their blocking positions, the enemy was held at arms length while the remainder of the RCT moved in swiftly to capture the oilfield infrastructure.

First Battalion, 5th Marines (1/5), followed by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5), attacked through the eastern breach site, lanes 'Red 4 - 6'. First Battalion attacked to seize the two southernmost GOSPs and the South Rumaylah intermediate pumping station. Just before the timetable had been accelerated, the battalion staff met to conduct a last minute review of their attack (planned for the following



On the road north through the oil fields, columns of dense oil smoke mark oil wells the Iraqis had ignited.

day.) During the session, the Marine on radio watch handed the Battalion Commander an urgent message. Lieutenant Colonel Padilla read the note, then looked up and said, “Guys, we’re going right now.” The Iraqi actions to ignite oil wells in the South Rumaylah required 1/5 and 3/5 to cross the border immediately in order to prevent the further destruction of the oil infrastructure. Lieutenant Colonel Padilla gave some final instructions, and the meeting began to disperse. Before everyone could hurry off, he stopped everyone and said, “Hold on. Chaplain, where are you?” Lieutenant Cash, the battalion chaplain, who had been standing behind Lieutenant Colonel Padilla during the meeting, led everyone in a short prayer before they left to carry out the mission.

After gearing up, the Battalion crossed the LD and entered Iraq. One hour prior to crossing the line of departure, the battalion was notified that there would be 30 minutes of preparation fires before they crossed the LD. The battalion quickly prosecuted known targets with available assets, focusing on Air Defense Artillery (ADA) and indirect fire assets. Three km into Iraq, Alpha Company encountered an Iraqi tank platoon supported by dismounted infantry. These were quickly destroyed by javelin, tank main gun and AAV up-gun systems. The battalion simultaneously secured the southernmost GOSPs (#3 and #4) with Bravo and Charlie Companies, respectively. During Bravo Company’s attack, led by Captain Jason E. Smith, they took over 200 EPWs with little resistance. Once GOSPs 3 and 4 were secure, Alpha Company conducted a forward passage of lines and turned east to seize the strategic intermediate pump station. Once committed to the attack against the pump station, the battalion’s Alpha Company found the compound defended by more than 100 enemy soldiers. They enveloped the objective, and utilized artillery Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions (DPICM) for suppression. It became clear that the enemy had established well-prepared trench lines and bunkers throughout the complex. The Alpha Company Commander, Captain Blair Sokol, moved forward with his company, directing a methodical sweep of the maze of enemy positions. Utilizing rockets, grenades, tank and small arms fire, his men followed his direction and rapidly moved through the complex and into adjacent positions.



AAVs transported Marines across the LD. These vehicles and their onboard weapons systems provided protection and speed for mechanized infantry units during the war.

Marines are conditioned to face danger and hardship, but nothing can adequately prepare them for the loss of one of their comrades. As the company continued its systematic clearing of the area around the pump station, they again met enemy resistance. During this fighting, the Division suffered its first Marine Killed-In-Action in Iraq. The Division mourned the loss of Second Lieutenant Therrel S. Childers of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment. He was fatally wounded when Iraqi vehicle-mounted troops launched a surprise attack using civilian trucks. He died